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EXAMPLES OF PROMINENT DESIGNERS.

[THOMAS CHIPPENDALE.]

BY LUTHER HOOPER.

THOMAS CHIPPENDALE, cabinet maker, whose works have of late been in such demand, and have fetched under the hammer in many cases fabulously

his art, a thorough business man and a practical workman. He remarks that the study of architecture is necessary to the designer of furniture, and asserts that cabinet making is the most useful and important of the arts depending on that mistress of them all.

The thoroughness with which all Chippendale's work was carried out, and the usually good and sensible general idea and construction of each piece may account for that favor in which it was held in his day, as well as for that which it obtains at the present time.

Although we much admire the plan and construction of Chippendale's work, we cannot possibly look with favor upon the meretricious and tawdry ornaments with which it is frequently disfigured. We can readily measure this objectionable feature by the singular effect produced on the otherwise excellent models, the Book-case, Fig. 1, the Cabinet, Fig. 2, and the Writing-desk, Fig. 3, by the frivolous ornamentation scattered over them. The French was the fashionable style of decoration of his time, and its influence and character are seen throughout the whole of the work of this master, even where he endeavored to imitate the Gothic and Chinese styles.

An illustration of the excellence of the essential idea of Chippendale's works is given in his designs for chairs. He first gives instructions in the method of drawing and constructing one of those most common and necessary articles of furniture. This for simplicity of line, amplitude of capacity, strength, durability and comfort, cannot be surpassed. Fig. 4 is copied from this drawing.

In the ornamentation of many of his chairs Chippendale, in order, no doubt, to meet the fashionable demand, overloaded them with carved work, which rendered them at the same

time absurd and uncomfortable. In many cases, too, he substituted the cabriole for the straight leg. One of the worst specimens of this injudicious ornamentation is represented in Fig. 5. It illustrates the fact that a good plan may be easily spoiled in its effect by meretricious decoration. Nothing could be more ridiculous to look at and uncomfortable to use than a chair with a back full of knobs and points, such as would result from the abundant carving of ribbons and scrolls indicated in the design. The same objection, although in a lesser degree, holds good of the chair at Fig. 6, the back of which shows the ribbon-work for which he was so noted.

Far better than those he decked with scrolls and ribbons are some of the designs which Chippendale calls Chinese, and which are only ornamented with more or less elaborate fret-work.

Fig. 4 is a sketch for a chair attributed to Chippendale, which for comfort, beauty of design, simplicity of construction, durability and delicacy of carving I have never seen surpassed. The workmanship is perfect. The fluting of the legs and back rails, as well as the caps and rosettes by which the latter are surmounted, are exquisitely carved, whilst they, at the same time, are unobtrusive, and present no points or excrescence to render the sitter uneasy.

The fret-work ornamenting the chair at Fig. 6 suggests to us that the cabinet work of Chippendale most in demand at the present day, is that ornamented in this manner. It is certainly the most pleasing and satisfactory of his work, and as far as one can judge, he was the first to apply it to furniture in any extent. It is totally distinct from the French style of ornament, and as superior as it is dis-

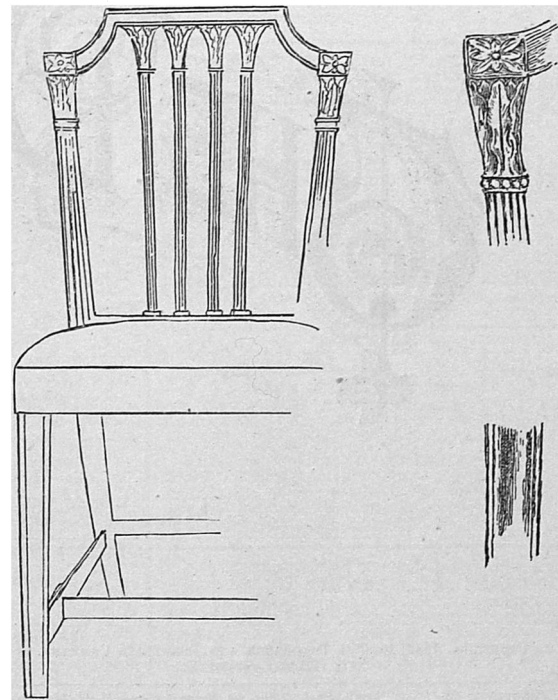


FIGURE FOUR.

tinct. Chippendale was, no doubt, indebted to the Chinese for the idea of ornamental fret-work, but was thoroughly original in his application of it to his designs. In some cases the fret was cut in thin wood and glued on to solid panel or whatever member of the furniture to which it was applied, and in others it was cut entirely through. In the latter case Chippendale, in order to secure the necessary strength, glued three thicknesses of wood together with the grain in different directions before cutting the fret.

Fig. 7 is the corner of a sideboard table ornamented by fretwork. In this case the fretwork is of one thickness only and glued on to the solid wood. It is a pity that the design is disfigured by the little piece of gingerbread ornament fitted into the angle of the leg and side. With this exception the design for a solid table is excellent.

Fig. 8, called by Chippendale a design for a "breakfast table," is an illustration of the use of the cut through fret; the sides, ends and brackets for the flaps are of this work, and give a very elegant and ornamental appearance to the table.

A little hanging cupboard (Fig. 9) ornamented

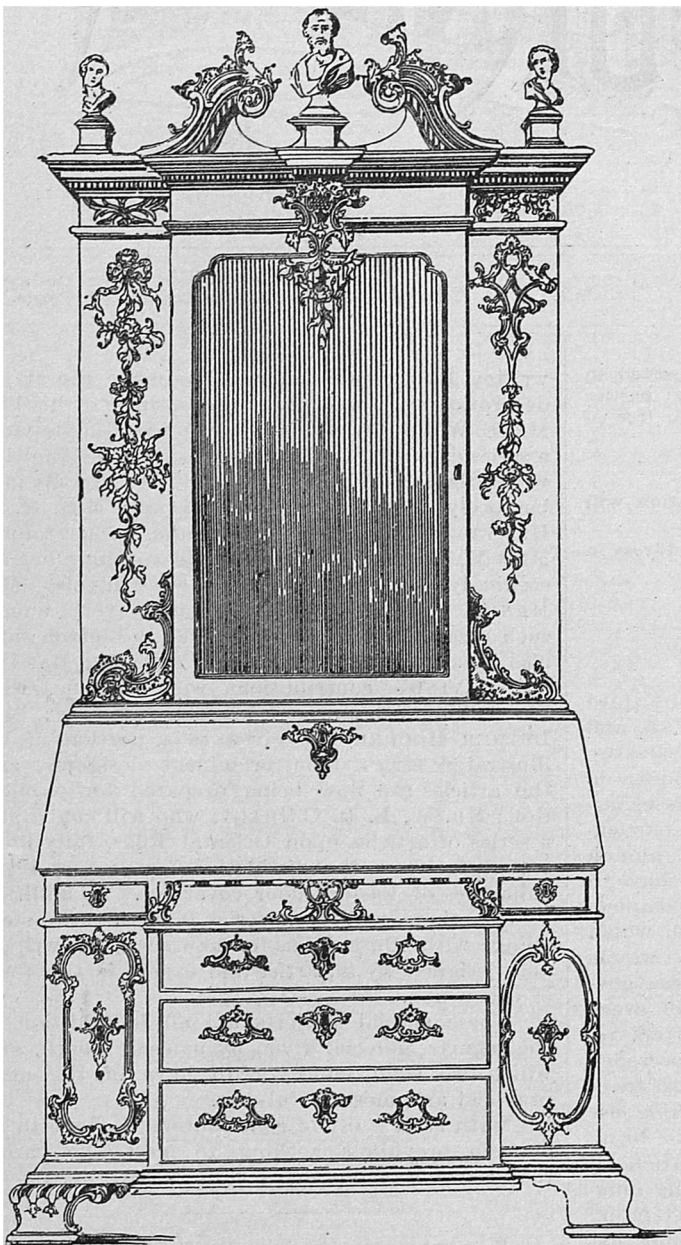


FIGURE ONE.

high prices, appears to have been at the head of his craft in England in the eighteenth century, when, in 1754, he published his celebrated book, "The Gentlemen's and Cabinet-Makers' Book."

In his preface to the book, Chippendale makes many observations which prove him to have been a man of much cultivation, as well as a lover of

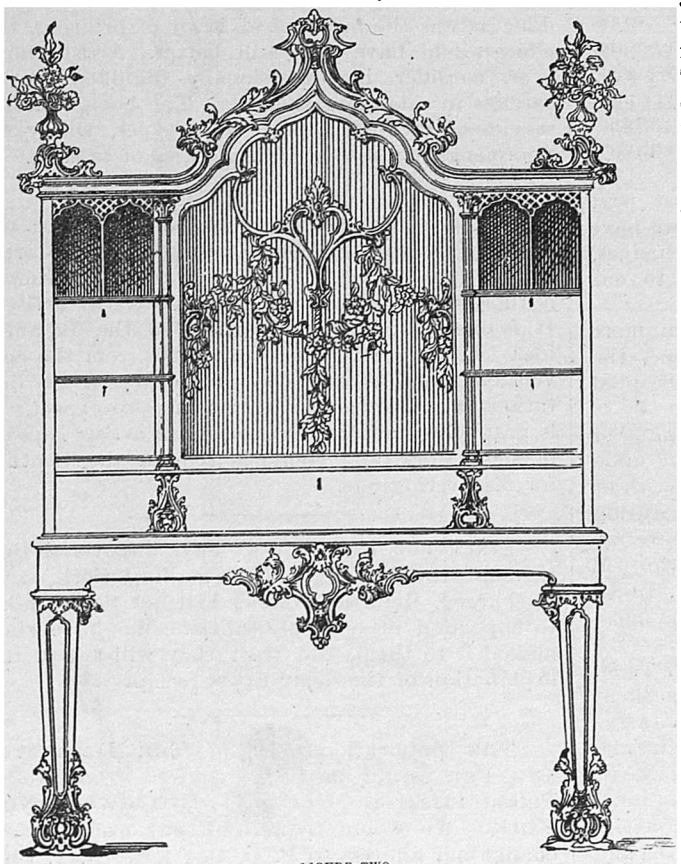


FIGURE TWO.

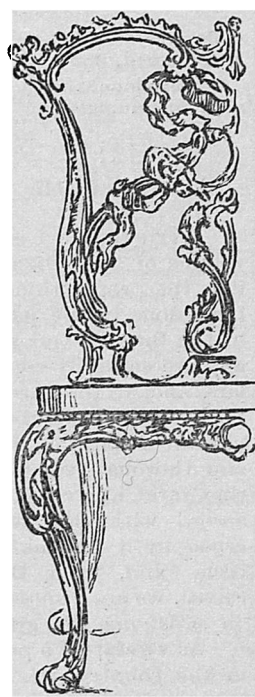


FIGURE FIVE.

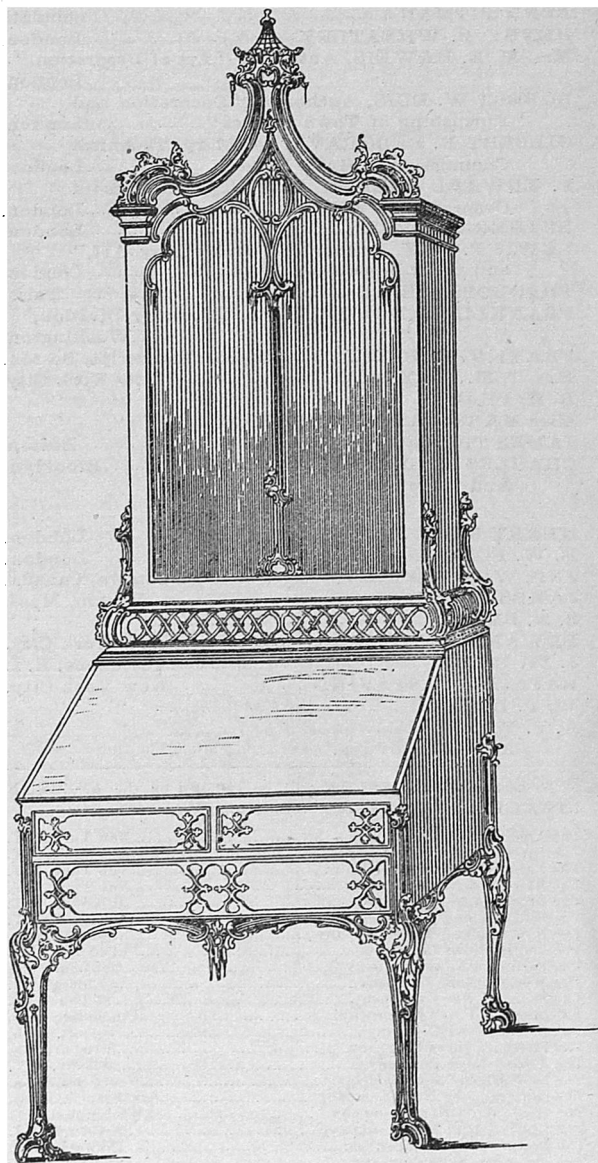


FIGURE THREE.

also with fretwork panels, etc., is very pretty, and quite in character with modern furnishing. The

frames for glass in the door are original and quaint. The little ornamental scrollwork introduced here at the base and the little canopy at the top, are not objectionable if they were simply and gracefully carved.

Fig. 10 is a sketch of the style of thing I think admirable to avoid in any selection or imitation of the works of Chippendale. It is the canopy of a bedstead the most hideous perhaps that the imagination of man could conceive. Judging from the designs in Chippendale's book, he could not originate a good sofa, easy chair, or bedstead.

Some excellent and useful designs for screens, chests of drawers, book-cases, china closets, linen

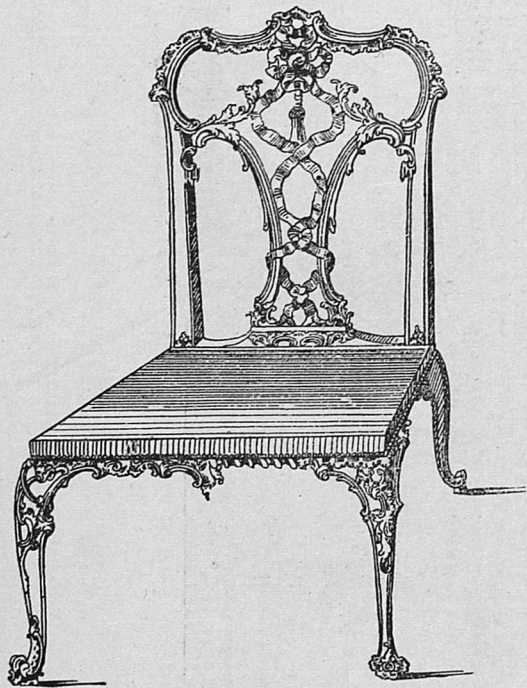


FIGURE SIX.

presses, and even tea caddies, are given in the "Gentleman's and Cabinet Makers' Directory," but the finest of all Chippendale's work was undoubtedly shown in this design, and manufacture of tables of various sorts. Strength and firmness, combined with elegance and simplicity, are characteristic of them all. I give at Fig. 11 a design for a writing table, which exhibits all these qualities in a high degree.

Thomas Chippendale must ever exert an influence with designers; and the strength of his work will grow greater as it becomes older. Few designers, few workers in his field have secured the lasting fame that certainly has come to him.

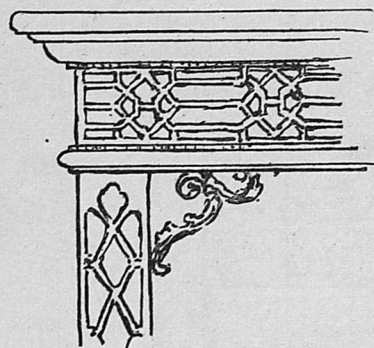


FIGURE SEVEN.

we might say, too, a permanent one. Injustice is done him by crediting to his hands all the fantastic articles bearing his name; they were, no doubt, the work of his children, possibly of his assistants and those learning under him.

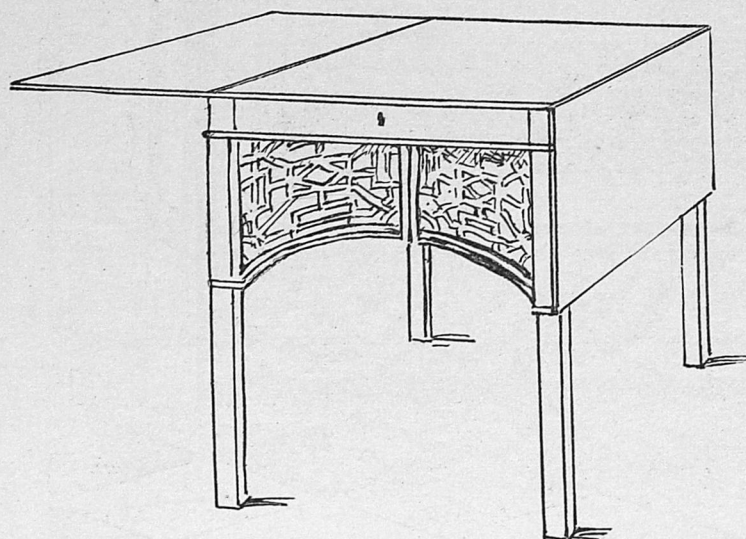


FIGURE EIGHT.

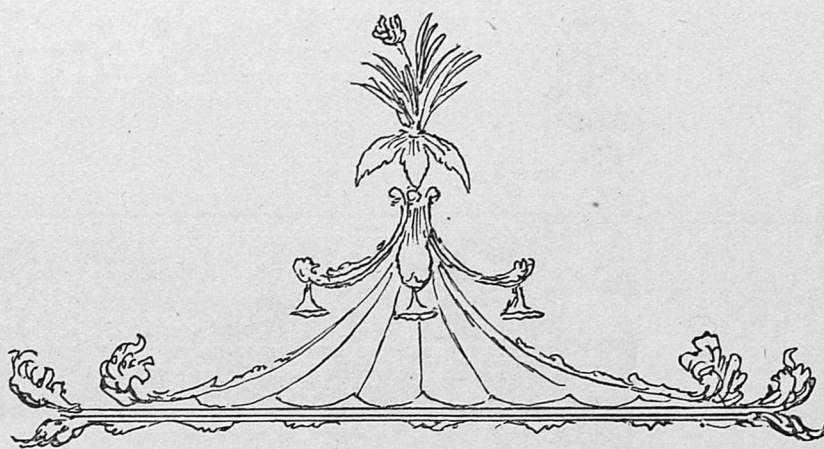


FIGURE TEN.

As his orders increased and business came in so rapidly, as it did ultimately, the demands upon his time were more than any worker could respond to, and yet retain the freshness and originality which marks the earliest efforts of an active mind. In the mechanical portions of his tasks, however, the same care and close attention was shown as had been his characteristic heretofore, the falling off was in his ever novelty-seeking brain, his restless desire after the "new" and the pretty.

Nor did he confine himself to furniture, as his great mass of sketches will show. He filled an odd moment with architectural pieces, or a bit of interior decoration, or, occasionally, a carriage-frame, and a variety of other things that would seem to us altogether out of scope of a furniture designer.

There is always more or less interest attached to the personal history of men who achieve distinction; and we hope, by studying their career, and noting how they met and conquered obstacles,

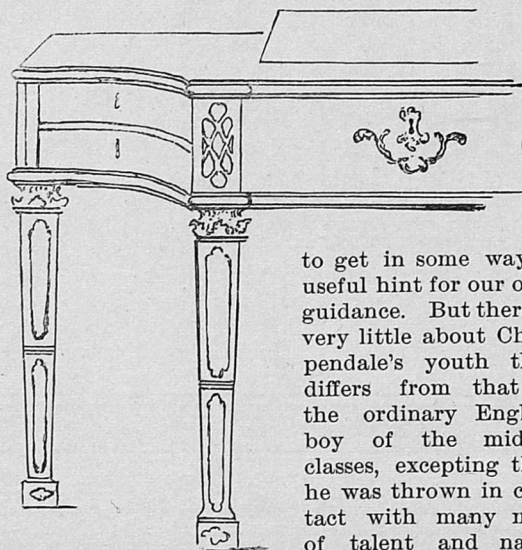


FIGURE ELEVEN.

to get in some way a useful hint for our own guidance. But there is very little about Chippendale's youth that differs from that of the ordinary English boy of the middle classes, excepting that he was thrown in contact with many men of talent and name whose association, no doubt, created in the young man a disposition to raise his trade to the dignity of an art, and he sacrificed his skill as a carver to his love of designing.

A writer in a recent number of the *Cabinet Maker*, concludes a somewhat fault-finding criticism on Chippendale in the following strain:

"I can admire, from a business point of view, the man who can press anything into his service, from a single piece of fret to a pagoda; but I cannot agree with those who say that such a one is never either vulgar or commonplace. The fact is, that Chippendale did the best he could to increase his business, just as the majority do now; and he would allow his fancy to run riot if thereby his returns could be increased. He puts the matter very candidly—although rather conceitedly—when he says: 'In executing many of these drawings my pencil has but faintly carried out those images my fancy suggested; but in this failure I console myself by reflecting that the greatest masters of every art have labored under the same difficulty.' Looking at some of the enrichments which he produced we may, I think, be thankful that his pencil did but 'faintly carry out the images his fancy suggested.' What would the unfettered ideas of Chippendale have been had his pencil been sufficiently vigorous!"

It may be asked whether this adverse view of the style in which he worked was never expressed in his time. It is some satisfaction to me to be able to say that it was, for his contemporary, Mr. Isaac Ware, 'surveyor to the king,' says in one of his architectural works, "It is our misfortune to see at this time an un-

meaning scrawl of C.'s inverted and hooped together, taking the place of Greek and Roman elegance, even inexpensive decorations. It is called 'the French,' and let them have praise of it; the Gothic shafts and Chinese bells are not beyond it or below it in poorness of imagination." Thus wrote Mr. Ware in Chippendale's time, and he was, I think right, in deploring the preference given to Rococo over the classic.

You might think, gentlemen, after listening to this tirade against Chippendale,

that I should conclude by advising you to have nothing to do with him or his productions; but such advice I am certainly not prepared to give. Indeed, I cordially recommend you to study every specimen of his skill."

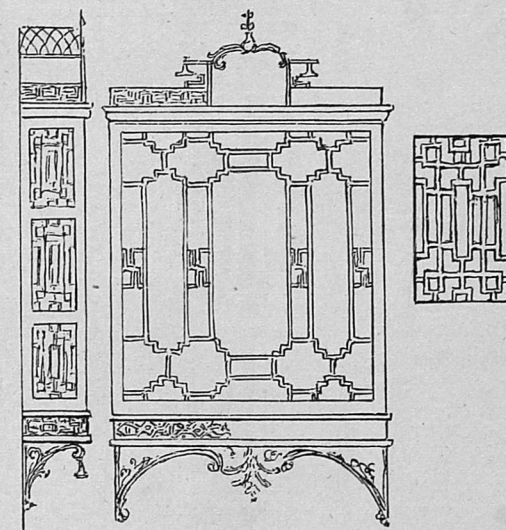


FIGURE NINE.

DRESSING BUREAU.

THE illustration of a dressing bureau, on page 187, is a design by Mr. Benn Pitman, of the Cincinnati School of Design. The carving and oil painting is the work of Mrs. Benn Pitman. The bureau is somewhat over the usual size; it is of black walnut, darkened and enriched with a stain of dragon's blood and alcohol, then hard finished. The top is of richly mottled wood, with a broad band of surface carving. The drawers, the interiors of which are of polished oak, run on wooden rollers, and are handled with extreme ease. The design combines elegance with convenience, and the decoration, though elaborate, is not overdone. The cutting on the face of the upper drawers is one inch relief, that on the lower drawers one half inch relief. The end panels, not shown in the design, are also richly carved. The panels, back of the shelves, are painted in oil; the subjects, summer and winter, are treated in subdued and delicate tints. The supporting pillars are of French walnut, and the capitals, of conventional foliage, are cut with taste and spirit. The foliated finals are the wild parsnip and a variety of Ceylon fern, admirably adapted to decorative use.

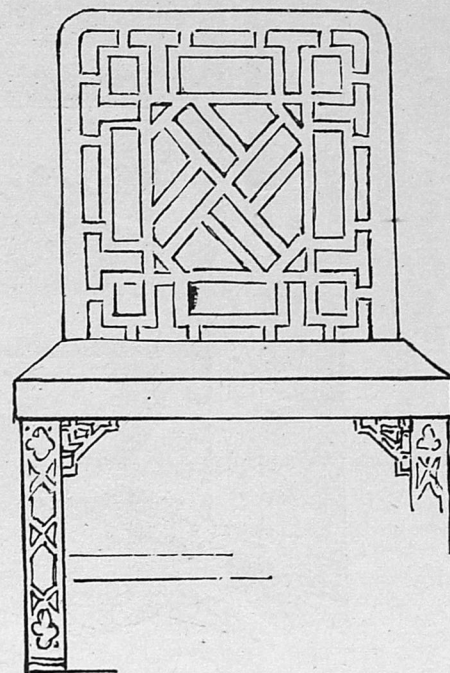


FIGURE TWELVE.